Evasion Circulaire

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Evasion Circulaire

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Summary

If a house were sentient, its walls would have many stories.

(Companion piece to 'Échelle de Cruauté')

The truck is not for starting.

Five years it has run with barely a hitch, always projecting its failures kindly in advance: a grumbling axle, a squealing brake pad, a rattling oil filter. Made it all the way to Tulsa and back once, for an aunt's funeral, without protest. Sunday afternoon, September fourteenth nineteen ninety seven, the truck has decided to give up the ghost. It sits inert, whining as it is turned over like a horse in a thunder storm.

The truck sits in a dusty driveway, or more appropriately a mechanical graveyard; car engines, radiators, boat motors, half finished restoration jobs on a tan coloured Buick Skylark and a Dodge Charger, both of which sit haphazardly underneath damaged tarpaulins. They all live next to the house, ramshackle itself, a long, low bungalow which does a good impression of three static caravans set together like pieces in a domino game. The house has only overlooked the steadily building mess of machinery for eight months, although if it knew how normally transitory its residents were then it might have been impressed with how long they'd stayed.

Which it would have, if the house were a sentient house.

Which it is not.

It is, however, losing one of its residents.

Underneath the bonnet of the truck can be seen a young man, frantically working on the engine. He has dirt smeared on one cheek, grease caught in the curls of his hair above his left ear and motor oil on his red shirt which, when he sees it later, will make him curse. He has been working hard since he woke three hours earlier, loading the truck with his meagre belongings. Yet it is not a hardship, as he is used to moving on a shoe string. Life stuffed in a cardboard box and duffel bag. In truth the young man sees the truck as probably his most prized possession, or he did until this morning. He will not think about the affection he once had for it when he sells it four years later to help fund his Masters.

On the porch of the house sits its other resident, legs wide as he reclines on a sturdy, well made Oxford chair, badly in need of a polish. The man lights a cigarette and continues to silently watch the young man's quick, efficient but desperate movements. He is old, perhaps looking older than he actually is, but it is possible for one to tell he was handsome once. Under the lines and the sun damaged skin and the fading, thinning blonde hair he has a lot in common with the young man's physiognomy; the same nose, the same strength of jaw, the same quiet contemplation in the eyes. The man has always resented the younger's eyes, being that they are identical to his mother's in shape and colour. They remind him of a better time, which was not truly better but has become so through rose tinted glasses.

"Is it the carburettor?" he asks, coughing roughly into his hand; he takes some time, the cough turning into a nasty hacking. Once it has passed he looks back up. The young man has not reacted, "If it's the carburettor then you might as well leave it till tomorrow. Won't find that easy."

“It’s not the carburettor,” the young man replies stiffly.

“You’ve been at it for hours. Take a break,” the man suggests with a forcedly laid back tone, “I got fried chicken to cook up in...”

“I’m not staying,” the young man states, standing up and turning away, from the car and the other man both, “I gotta be there in two days, dad. At this rate I’ll be getting in at midnight.”

If the house had been blessed with ears and, more importantly, a consciousness then it would surely have been shocked to learn that the man lounging on its porch is the younger’s father. The younger has never called the other by the affectionate term during their stay. In fact the house would have believed that the two were simply cohabiting in resentment, like most people did these days. Perhaps it would have made sense to the house, to find out that the resentment is related to blood ties.

Again, if the house were a sentient house.

Which it is not.

Suffice to say it takes another forty minutes for the young man to find the problem, and an hour and a half to fix it. In the time it takes he has been lulled into thinking about the first time his father decided to hand him a wrench, point to a bolt and say ‘Clockwise. It tightens clockwise’ and his clumsy young hands had done their best. The first time his father had raised his hand to him, whiskey on his breath and confusion in his eyes when he was struck in return. The first time his father had taken him fishing, standing behind him, large hands over his own, as he said ‘Easy. *Easy*’ when the fish bit and pulled. The night his father, with no warning, had put the cigar out on the back of his hand, eyes glazed and smirk in place, and the shock had allowed him to stay stony faced until he reached his room where he cried himself to sleep wishing he could be normal.

The sun has tipped past high and is heading for the west by the time he sits behind the wheel and feels the rumbling purr of the engine, the blast of the rather temperamental air conditioning and the far more promising feel of the wheel beneath his palms. For a little while he simply closes his eyes and lays his head back against the rest, breathing in the smell of dust and hot air.

When he turns to wind the window down, mouth half open to call out, the porch is empty. The young man stops with his fingers resting on the plastic handle. To look at him no one would know what he is thinking. No one would know the familiar hurt that he feels, one which harks back to his youth, hiding at doorways and listening to his father explain to others why he wished his son was just like all the other kids. No one would know that he is suddenly realising the brink on which he stands, making a choice which will change his life for better or worse. His eyes are blank and his face is set into an impenetrable mask of bland acceptance of the world around him. The house has seen the look often over his stay, enough that perhaps it would have understood the young man to be entirely devoid of the ability to laugh, raise his voice or care.

Again, if the house were a sentient house.

Which it is not.

Instead, the young man leaves without saying goodbye to his father and begins his long drive from Georgia to D.C. and the George Washington University where he will be told, two weeks into his first course, that his father has died of a massive heart attack. He will make the informed decision to pay for the funeral out of his savings but he will not attend. Summarily the only two people that will stand beside his father's grave are the man who dug it from the earth and the local priest.

And the young man will go on to enjoy mediocre academic achievements influenced mainly by his inability to give his lecturers what they expect and instead force his own views. Yet he will succeed in impressing a handful of his peers. Enough to win him a scholarship for a Masters degree in forensic science, his dissertation thusly becoming a seminal work still referenced today, detailing both the basic and the finer points of forensic entomology. Later he will join the New Orleans Police Department where he will realise that no amount of training could prepare him for dealing with living human beings and their judgmental attitudes and their deeply ingrained prejudices and their fear.

When he is eventually forced to gun down a man threatening his own son, the young man will retreat into the safety of his own mind, from which many around him think he will never return. Some will say they thought all along that this would happen, while others will have a secret sympathy for the great and yet untempered empathy he appears to have with those he protects and those he punishes.

Eventually the young man will see an opportunity in the safe shell offered by the FBI, who will reject his flaws whilst avidly exploiting his talents. He will be pushed out of candidacy for the status of agent and the badge and the want that comes with it to find the people who upset balance and bring them to a wild sort of justice. And he will catch killers and save lives but it will not be enough. He will be forced back into the safety of academia and research and find a familiar security in teaching others. He will be forced to temper himself and hide his undesirable personality from the world while reconstructing a new one in its place, even if eventually he will be pulled back into the world of sanity and madness and the fine grey area between the two.

Then, one day, he will meet another man who appears to be a microcosm of everything he hates, *rich and supercilious and invasive,* and it will seem like logic to despise him. And yet, despite his better intentions, they will grow on each other over time, like fungus over wood. And all the training and the preparation and the work and the hiding and the secrecy will seem for nothing when the young man, now no longer young, looks at the other man and sees everything he ever wanted. And he will fall in love.

And later he will find he is unable to look at the man without seeing all that he is in return. And he will see the darkness and know that he must make a choice. And, whichever way he follows, it will once more be a choice he is forced to accept or regret. A choice he must live with.

Russell Graham passed from the collective human consciousness and out into the ether of the universe on the twenty eighth of September nineteen ninety seven, leaving no significant hole in the lives of those he had encountered.

Will Graham spent the rest his life pretending he did not blame himself for his father's death and that he stood by his choice to leave home without regret.

The house would think it preferred the young family that moved in after the Graham's vacated, although it would secretly long for the considered silences and the moments of civility between the younger and the older man which, for their brevity and rarity, seemed all the more precious.

Or it would have, if the house were a sentient house.

Which it was not.

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